

Exclusive interview. Turn mutual borders into boundaries of lasting peace and friendship

Exclusive interview

The «Xalq so'zi» newspaper

15.08.2018.

Turn mutual borders into boundaries of lasting peace and friendship

In June of this year, the 18th summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was held in the Chinese city of Qingdao. Experts call it historical and even epochal, including due to the adoption of a number of significant initiatives. From January 1, 2019, the head of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Vladimir Norov will officially take office as a Secretary-General of the SCO. We have had an interview with him.

- Vladimir Imomovich, what are the main results of the Qingdao summit?

- Today, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization takes a worthy place among authoritative and influential international organizations and serves as an effective factor for security, stability and sustainable development at the regional and global level.

At the same time, I would especially note that the organization is guided in its work by the principles of openness and not targeting against third parties. The commitment to the “Shanghai spirit” based on trust, equality, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for multiculturalism, striving for common development led to a growing interest in cooperation with the SCO among the countries of neighboring and distant regions, international and regional organizations. The “Shanghai Spirit” has become a unique source and vitality of the effective activities of the SCO. The positive results of over 160 events held during the presidency of the People’s Republic of China further have strengthened the foundation of cohesion and unity.

At the summit in Qingdao, the heads of states summed up the year of the Chinese presidency in the SCO, constructively discussed plans for further cooperation, and also identified vectors for development of the organization. This summit has become historic and opened a new milestone in the activities of the SCO due to a number of factors.

Firstly, the meeting of the heads of the SCO member states in Qingdao has been the first since the entry of new members into the organization represented by India and Pakistan. With their accession, the SCO has become one of the largest international organizations with the most extensive territory and covering almost half of the world's population, about a third of global GDP. This range opens up not only significant prospects for cooperation in the organization’s space, but also new horizons for active diverse relations with the international community, expands the dialogue platform of the SCO in the interests of regional and international security and stability, joint sustainable development.

Secondly, the summit has demonstrated an increase in the authority and influence of the SCO on the world stage. The heads of state or government of 12 countries, as well as the heads of 8 international organizations and institutions gathered in Qingdao. The summit was attended by the UN First Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed, senior administrative officials of ASEAN, CIS, CSTO, CICA, senior representatives of the EAEC, World Bank and IMF. The number of registered foreign guests exceeded two thousand, more than three thousand Chinese and foreign journalists covered the event.

All participants of the summit emphasized that the People’s Republic of China over the past year of the chairmanship made a significant contribution to overcoming new challenges and threats in the SCO area in order to create a safer and more prosperous world.

Thirdly, the Qingdao summit markedly strengthened the legal framework for cooperation in the SCO. 23 documents were adopted covering all areas of multilateral interaction. This is a record figure in the entire history of the SCO summits. The final document - the Qingdao Declaration of the Heads of the SCO member states - reflected consolidated position of the participants on the widest range of issues of ensuring regional and international security. The leaders of the countries unanimously confirmed the need to increase interaction and bring cooperation to a qualitatively new level. Strict commitment by the member states to the “Shanghai spirit” and “consensus” on the basis of solidarity and mutual benefit will make it possible to make the SCO space a model for the international community in the context of immersing a number of regions of the world in local conflicts and the global crisis management system. This task has acquired particular importance with the entry into the SCO of the two largest states of South Asia. The Qingdao Declaration reaffirmed intention of the parties to continue to develop good-neighborly and friendly relations and turn mutual borders into boundaries of lasting peace and friendship.

The summit approved an Action Plan for 2018-2022 on the implementation of the provisions of the Treaty on long-term good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation of the SCO member states. Important documents include Cooperation Program of the SCO member states in countering terrorism, separatism and extremism for 2019-2021, Concept of cooperation in the field of Environmental Protection, the Anti-Drug Strategy of the SCO member states for the next five years, Concept on Prevention of Drug and Psychotropic Abuse substances. Joint Appeal of the Heads of the SCO Member States to Youth and the Joint Statement of the Heads of the SCO Member States on Trade Facilitation were adopted.

Undoubtedly, the agreements reached at the Qingdao summit opened a new stage in the development of effective and diverse cooperation in combating modern challenges and threats, ensuring sustainable development of our countries, and enhancing the role of the SCO in regional and international politics. Their implementation will give a completely new dynamics of the organization. The implementation of the decisions of the leaders of the SCO member countries essentially means its harmonious, consistent evolution in accordance with modern world trends.

Thus, the summit in Qingdao once again demonstrated the effectiveness of the SCO, readiness and ability of the member states to consolidate common efforts in the face of modern challenges and threats. In my opinion, this was one of the main results of the meeting in Qingdao.

- What place in the final document of the summit - the declaration - did the new initiatives of Uzbekistan take? What is their significance in further strengthening cooperation and security?

- Against the background of the expansion of the SCO, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev outlined the most urgent tasks designed to foster formation of a new atmosphere of good-neighborliness and constructivism both in Central Asia and in the SCO space. The initiatives of the Uzbek side, according to experts, are of conceptual significance for the further development of the SCO, strengthening its economic and political potential as well as its international influence. In the Qingdao Declaration the member states welcomed an initiative of Uzbekistan at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly to adopt a special resolution on “Education and Religious Tolerance”, as well as outcomes of the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan “Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Cooperation” (26 -27 March 2018) as a positive contribution to the process of restoring peace and stability in this country.

Also at the initiative of Uzbekistan, for the first time in the history of the SCO, the Joint Appeal of the Heads of the SCO Member States to the Youth and the Action Plan for the implementation of its provisions were adopted. At present the importance of combining the efforts of the international community in countering attempts to involve young people in terrorist, separatist and extremist groups comes to the fore.

The SCO countries are united in understanding the need for coordinated and immediate measures to counter spread of radical and destructive ideologies among young people. In this regard, for the first time, the SCO is concentrating on integrated work on education, spiritual and moral education of the young

generation. Member states are determined to work together. This is reflected, in particular, in the Program of Action for Implementing the Provisions of the Joint Appeal of the Heads of States of the SCO to Youth. It envisages the tasks of forming a comprehensively harmonious personality and ability to resist various destructive forces, familiarize young people with modern knowledge, strengthen interethnic and civic harmony and mutual understanding, foster patriotism and internationalism. The program provides for the promotion of joint economic and humanitarian initiatives aimed at involving young people in entrepreneurial activities and innovative projects, enhancing scientific and technical exchange and joint research, and establishing cooperation between youth organizations to jointly combat international terrorism, separatism and extremism.

At the same time, great practical importance has the statement of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the summit that the SCO Youth Council, in which Uzbekistan intends to take the most active part, can become a real “locomotive” in the implementation of that program.

Of course, all these creative intentions will contribute to active participation of young people of the SCO countries in the life of society, mobilization of its capabilities and potential for individual development and well-being, progress of their countries, for their personal contribution to strengthening dialogue.

I would especially like to draw your attention to the fact that the initiative of Uzbekistan on the adoption of the resolution of the UN General Assembly “Education and Religious Tolerance” and the Joint Appeal of the Heads of the SCO Member States to Young people have received wide approval in international political and expert-analytical circles. Their support from the SCO confirms the desire of member countries to strengthen the cohesion of the organization, increase its influence on the world stage and speak with “one voice” on all topical issues of regional and international issues.

- At the Qingdao Summit of the SCO, the Council of Heads of the States approved your candidacy for the post of Secretary General of the SCO. How will you build your work in this post?

- The Qingdao SCO summit for me was the beginning of an important stage in my professional life. I regard the appointment of the SCO Secretary General as a high trust, a great honor, shown to me by the heads of the SCO states, first of all by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev. This is also a special responsibility. Having started to fulfill my duties, I intend to continue the established traditions of the SCO, to make a feasible contribution to further development of the organization, successful implementation of the tasks set before the SCO Secretariat. The fundamental principle of work in this post I will consider is the upholding the interests of all the SCO member countries.

At the summit in Qingdao, the parties agreed to strengthen cooperation in various aspects to create a community with a common future. As a new head of the SCO Secretariat, I plan to give priority, above all, to the following four areas:

Full implementation of previously reached agreements and adopted conceptual documents aimed at developing comprehensive cooperation and strengthening trust and good neighborly relations among the SCO member states.

Today, when uncertainty and unpredictability are growing around the world, consolidation of mutually beneficial and friendly ties in the SCO space is a vital task for us. The primary priority is to ensure timely implementation of the Action Plan adopted in Qingdao for 2018-2022 to implement the provisions of the Treaty on long-term good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation of the SCO member states. As it was emphasized by the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, this is the “cornerstone” document of our partnership, without which it is impossible to achieve the set goals including security and development in the space of the organization. Ensuring security and stability in the SCO region is also closely related to development of the situation in Afghanistan. Considering this factor, the active involvement of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group mechanism to consolidate the efforts of the countries in this direction becomes

more important than ever before. As President of Russia Vladimir Putin said, it is important to jointly combat the terrorist threat emanating from the territory of this country, stop the production and transit of drugs, and assist Afghanistan in national reconciliation, economic recovery and stabilization.

Substantive enrichment of the SCO agenda by enhancing economic cooperation. Over the years of the organization's existence, despite the declared deepening of economic cooperation as one of the main priorities of the SCO, the member countries have so far failed to develop and implement multilateral joint projects. Cooperation in this sphere remains the least developed component. In this regard, the SCO summit emphasized the need to move to implementation of trade and investment projects between our countries from the bilateral to the multilateral level.

In the face of increasing protectionism in world trade, slow recovery of world markets, it is of particular importance to increase contacts within the framework of specialized SCO mechanisms. As the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon stated, the urgent task remains to strengthen the role of the Interbank Association and the SCO Business Council as one of the reliable bridges connecting the business circles of the organization's member states. At the same time, more than ever it is necessary to intensify cooperation in the development and implementation of new large and mutually beneficial joint projects, as well as in the formation for these purposes of appropriate financial instruments, that is, the Development Bank and the Fund (Special Account) for the development of the SCO. The creation of multilateral funding mechanisms for priority joint projects within the organization will help to more effectively solve common tasks.

Moreover, proposals to simplify export-import operations, stimulate launch of specific economic, infrastructure and transport and logistics projects in the territory of the SCO countries, develop multilateral regional relations using the platform of the Forum of Heads of the SCO Regions create a popular model for the growth of mutual trade. In this regard, the statement by the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping on the construction of a demonstration zone in Qingdao for regional trade and economic cooperation between the PRC and the SCO, as well as the creation of a legal services committee for the SCO member states for the purpose of legal support for business exchange, is significant. As part of the SCO Interbank Consortium, China will create a special credit facility in the amount of 30 billion yuan.

Let me remind you that the President of Uzbekistan at the Qingdao summit identified effective use of the transport and transit potential of the SCO space as an important strategic task. Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that within the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative the implementation of inter-regional transport projects is topical - these are the new shortest routes to the largest world markets. Uzbekistan stands for the construction of the railway lines Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat, China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan. President of Kyrgyzstan Sooronbay Jeenbekov said that the republic is also interested in the earliest launch of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project, which will significantly increase the transit and export potential of the SCO countries. To this end, Uzbekistan is planning to hold the first meeting of the heads of the railway administrations of the SCO member states. It has been proposed to consider the possibility of establishing the SCO International Transport and Logistics Association.

Active introduction of modern innovative technologies in the SCO space. With deep penetration into the life of information technologies, digitalization of society is becoming an irreversible factor in the processes of globalization. In this regard, it is necessary to unite the efforts of the member states for joint implementation of innovative programs and projects within the framework of the SCO. The partnership should focus on the development and widespread adoption of high technology, digital economy and alternative energy.

Taking into account the presence and functioning in many of the SCO countries of programs for development of the digital economy, prioritizing acceleration of the processes of digitalization and introducing new technologies is in the interests of all members of the organization.

Here it is important to take into account that China is one of the most developed countries in the world to digitize society and the state. The experience gained by China can play a key role in its development in other SCO states. According to some estimates, the information technology sector in the PRC's GDP structure is 4.7 percent. It accounts for 40 percent of total global e-commerce transactions. According to the Boston Consulting Group in 2016 Chinese consumers spent about 750 billion dollars on Internet purchases. The large Internet company "Alibaba" has so far created 31 million jobs and by 2035 plans to create an additional 122 million jobs in the Chinese digital economy. Today the company is actively working in the SCO space: in 2017 more than 20 million consumers in the SCO countries purchased goods from China through "AliExpress".

The business school of the Chinese company "Alibaba" has launched a global program for training specialists in the field of electronic commerce. Its goal is to accelerate the development of e-commerce in the world through the training of students and entrepreneurs for the skills of the digital economy. In five years, it is expected to train 1.2 million people.

To date, participants of the program are universities of the ASEAN countries. I think that the SCO countries' universities should also become its active participants. It is noteworthy that development and coordination of joint projects for young people in the field of ICT are main points of the Action Program for implementing the provisions of the Joint Appeal of the Heads of the SCO Member States to the Youth.

The statement of the leaders of the states in Qingdao to intensify cooperation in the sphere of innovation and high technology will give new impetus to the development of this industry, and will also help to unleash the enormous and far unrealized potential of the SCO countries. I would like to emphasize the consonance of these intentions with the priorities of Uzbekistan, which were identified by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2018 that was declared as the "Year of support for active entrepreneurship, innovative ideas and technologies", as well as in the Action Strategy.

The implementation of the proposal of Shavkat Mirziyoyev on holding a Forum of the Information Technology and Innovation Development annually with participation of governments and business circles of the SCO countries can become one of the effective mechanisms of cooperation and an important platform for the exchange of experience.

The involvement of scientific, technical and technological potential of all member countries will not only ensure achievement of a technological breakthrough, but will also contribute to diversification of economic and investment cooperation within the framework of the SCO.

Capacity building of the SCO member countries in the field of agriculture. And it is huge. Today, the international community, including the SCO countries with a total population of 3.2 billion people, is facing an urgent need to ensure food security. According to UN estimates, the population of Central Asia has grown from 20 million in 1956 to 70 million at present, and by 2050 it will be about 94 million, which will undoubtedly aggravate the problem of providing food to the population of the region. This necessitates taking immediate measures to saturate the market with high-quality, safe and affordable food.

According to FAO, after 30 years in order to feed the population of the planet it will be needed 70 percent more food. This aggravates the problem of increasing efficiency of agriculture through the introduction of innovative technologies, in particular, generating special agricultural technology parks.

The proposal to create "green corridors" for trade in agricultural products, as well as to develop a cluster system for its production and processing, deserves special attention. This task fully meets the interests of all the participants, as it creates conditions and new opportunities for expanding the export of agricultural products to the markets of the SCO member states and their active interaction. Such a balance of mutually beneficial plans gives every reason to consider the decision of the heads of the SCO member states "On the development of a draft program of cooperation on food security" timely and very relevant.

- For the first time, a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation between the SCO Secretariat and UNESCO was signed in Qingdao (2018-2022). What interaction vectors does it define?

- Cooperation between the SCO and UNESCO should contribute to the development and strengthening of cultural and humanitarian ties, interaction in the field of science and education, better study of unique features of the cultural heritage of the SCO peoples, its widespread presentation to the world community by enhancing tourist exchanges. As the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi stated, over millennia the geographical space of the SCO has been inspiring scientific, philosophical, spiritual and cultural progress of the whole world.

Undoubtedly, this document will contribute to the integration of the SCO member states into the global tourist market and, thus, to development of countries potential in the field of tourism. It should be emphasized that in the organization's space there are 15 percent of the World Cultural Heritage sites included in the UNESCO list. Only in Uzbekistan there are about 7 thousand unique historical and cultural sights that attract tourists from all over the world. It is estimated that in 2017 the number of people who arrived in China from the SCO countries reached 2.5 million, an increase of 8.6 percent. In turn, over 1.8 million Chinese tourists visited other SCO states, while in 2017 the number of Chinese tourists was 130.5 million and increased by 8 percent over the year. At the same time, they spent 250.6 billion USD on external tourism.

Experts note that the number of Chinese tourists in the world by 2021 will reach 200 million, and their expenses will amount to 429 billion USD. These data indicate the presence of tremendous opportunities for increasing mutual tourist exchange. For this purpose, the summit adopted a Plan of joint actions to implement the Program of cooperation of the SCO member states in the field of tourism for the period 2019-2020.

I am convinced that establishment of practical cooperation of the SCO with the World Tourism Organization, as well as creation of the Silk Road University at the historical crossroads of civilizations in Samarkand, which embodies the initiative of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, will make a significant contribution to the development of tourism in the SCO space.

The SCO area serves as a focal point of colossal spiritual and cultural wealth. It is important to equally care not only about its preservation and multiplication, but also about its effective use in the interests of present and future generations. In this context, documents adopted within the framework of the SCO will play a key role in enhancing the multifaceted and mutually beneficial cooperation in the vast area of Eurasia, will make an invaluable contribution to the stability and development of not only the Central Asian states as the "core of the Shanghai organization", but also the neighboring regions.

In the context of global geopolitical and economic changes and the ever-shifting potential of world development to the East, the SCO can become embodiment of the "center of gravity" of world socio-economic development, showing high coordination in the struggle against modern challenges and threats. The increased interest of a wide range of countries and influential international structures in cooperation with the SCO shows that the "Shanghai 8" has firmly established itself as an authoritative international organization and its relevance is quite high today.